

NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS

It's pretty common to be told that class "doesn't exist any more", that "we're all middle-class now" or that the class struggle is "over." When workers are on the back foot and our organisations are weak, it's sometimes easy to believe that



stuff is true. But when you can't open a newspaper without reading some screaming denunciation of "mindless militants" causing "chaos" for daring to strike, and when bosses go to the courts to get pretty much any big strike declared illegal (and somehow the court *always* sides with the boss), you realise that class definitely still exists.

Recently, high-profile disputes by railway signal workers and British Airways cabin crew have fallen foul of Britain's anti-union laws. Other strikes, including ones by journalists resisting job

cuts, have also been banned. These laws place serious restrictions on what kind of actions unions are allowed to take and make them jump through all kinds of hoops. It's impossible to comply with all the law's stipulations, so whenever there's a strike that bosses don't feel like tolerating they can take the union to court and have it declared illegal. The whole judicial system is rigged to favour the bosses – it's part of the same capitalist state machinery that exists to defend the interests of big capitalists like the British Airways bosses or the owners

of Network Rail.

In the British Airways ballots, turnouts have consistently reached nearly 80% with up to 81% of workers voting for strike action. But apparently that's "illegal", whereas it's perfectly fine for BA boss Willie Walsh to push through pay-freezes, job cuts and casualisation and expect his employees to simply roll over and take it. Does that sound democratic? Does that sound like class doesn't exist any more?

Trade unions can't respond simply by trying really hard to make sure we get all the technical procedures right. Of course we should make our balloting as transparent and democratic as possible, but when the law and the courts are so heavily rigged in favour of the other side we need to be launching political campaigns to get these laws abolished.

(Sylvia Pankhurst cont'd)

In 1918, Christabel was standing as a Women's Party candidate in alliance with the Lloyd George/Tory Coalition, while Sylvia became a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Her support of the Bolshevik Revolution earned her the insulting title of "Little Miss Russia". In 1927, Sylvia was broken off from her family due to a conflict over "family values" – she refused to marry and take the name of the father of her son, as her mother demanded.

Despite her disagreements with Lenin over parliament and how a party should organise, Sylvia did not become disillusioned with communism and continued her fight for many years, supporting the Spanish republicans in the revolution of the 1930s, helping Jewish refugees in the shadow of Nazi Germany and defending Ethiopia from invasion by fascist Italy. Sylvia Pankhurst died in Ethiopia in 1960. We remember her not only as a feminist – but as a communist, and take inspiration from her example.